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SUBJECT: GAMBARI CONVENES THE NINTH BURMA GROUP OF FRIENDS
MEETING

REF: STATE 70206

11. (SBU) Summary. On July 8, Special Advisor Gambari convened the ninth Group of Friends of Burma meeting on behalf of Secretary-General Ban. Gambari reviewed Ban's schedule of meetings during the trip as well as his brief visit to the Delta and speech to the diplomatic corps and others. Gambari highlighted two extended meetings with Senior General Than Shwe, where Ban conveyed in the "clearest possible terms" the UN's and the international community's expectations. Gambari underscored the SYG's "deep disappointment" that his request to visit with Aung San Suu Kyi was denied -- a sentiment echoed by all the Friends. According to Gambari, Ban suggested that the Burmese participate in a high level meeting on Burma during the UNGA General Debate in September, which the Burmese are considering. All Friends unanimously reiterated support for Ban's trip and the continued efforts of the good offices mission. Many also stressed the need for broader engagement with the regime and raised upcoming elections and ASSK's trial. Predictably, there were differing assessments of Ban's trip, but Ambassador DiCarlo reminded the Friends that the real issue is the regime's failure to engage meaningfully with the UN and the international community, not whether Ban's trip was a success. End Summary.

UN Special Advisor Gambari

12. (SBU) Special Advisor Gambari said he was tasked by Secretary-General Ban to brief the Group of Friends on the "tough but necessary" trip. He commented that the timing of the trip -- between the trial of ASSK and upcoming 2010 elections -- made it particularly important and especially challenging. Gambari conveyed Ban's gratitude to the group for its support of his "judgment to proceed" with the trip. He stressed that Ban conveyed in the "clearest possible terms" the expectations of the UN and the international community to the highest levels of the Burmese regime, including Senior General Than Shwe. Gambari listed Ban's meetings, which included extended sessions with Than Shwe, Prime Minister Thein Sein, registered political parties, the NLD, and ethnic cease-fire groups. He said Ban's speech to the diplomatic community, NGOs and government officials provided a valuable opportunity to convey important messages broadly. Gambari said that Ban returned to the Delta and was briefed by the Tripartite Core Group on progress since Cyclone Nargis. Gambari said Ban was "deeply disappointed" that his request to see ASSK was denied.

13. (SBU) According to Gambari, Ban discussed at length with Burmese officials the need for Burma to take meaningful steps on the five point agenda in addition to progress on the humanitarian front, specifically encouraging the regime to

grant outstanding visas for humanitarian workers and broadening international humanitarian access to regions beyond the Delta. (Note: Gambari called Ban's approach "five plus one.") Of the five points, Ban focused on the release of all political prisoners, including ASSK; the resumption of a dialogue between the regime and the opposition; and the need to create conditions conducive to credible, legitimate elections. Specifically, Gambari said that Ban requested the immediate release of ASSK and the release of all political prisoners by 2010 elections. He proposed that the authorities publish the election law as early as possible and set a date for 2010 elections. He said that the regime should allow NLD offices to open and should re-register "deregistered" political parties. Ban also asked the regime to consider UN assistance and independent observers for upcoming elections. According to Gambari, Ban also suggested participation in a high-level meeting of the Group of Friends of Burma on the margins of the General Debate in September, which the Burmese are considering. (Note: Ban also convened a high-level meeting on Burma last September, inviting foreign ministers to attend. Burma did not attend the meeting.) Gambari said that the Secretary-General "believes support to the good offices mission and the efforts of the Secretary-General -- both individually and as a group -- are more important now than ever."

14. (SBU) On next steps, Gambari remarked that Ban asked him to consult with the Friends on the best way forward, noting that he has also been tasked with following up with the regime on the points raised by Ban during his trip. Gambari

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said that there was no timeline given but that "the ball is in Burma's court" and the regime must return the ball in a "reasonable time."

P-5 Reactions

15. (SBU) The P-5 voiced disappointment with the regime's decision to reject Ban's request for a meeting with ASSK. Ambassador DiCarlo conveyed refotel points and reminded the group that the discussion is not on whether Ban's trip was a success or failure, but about the Burmese regime's failure to engage meaningfully with the UN and the international community and respond to their demands as delivered by Ban. UK DPR Parham characterized the regime's lack of response as an opportunity missed and added that a negative outcome of ASSK's trial would demand a "robust response" from the international community. Both the UK and France commented that Ban should brief the Security Council on his trip upon his return.

16. (SBU) China and Russia said the number of high-level meetings clearly indicated a successful trip, stressing that Ban had the ability to convey international concerns directly to Senior General Than Shwe, thus meeting the primary objective for his visit. Chinese DPR Liu emphasized the importance of broad engagement as opposed to focusing on political issues or "one person." He also encouraged the group to support the election process and reminded the Friends that the good offices mission was a process. Russian DPR Dolgov added that there is no meaningful alternative to the good offices mission. Notably, at the end of their interventions, both Russia and China wished Gambari "good luck."

Asian Perspective

17. (SBU) Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, India and Indonesia were united in their support of Ban's trip and the good office's mission. Though disappointed with Ban's inability to see ASSK, each praised the SYG for his substantive, meaningful visit and extensive meetings with the regime. Japanese PR Takasu said he hopes the Burmese authorities will respond positively to Ban's requests, adding

that the Friends should continue to develop and maintain the "toolbox" for engagement with the country with elections as an important next step. Vietnam, Thailand, India and Indonesia all stressed the need for broad engagement that extends beyond the political sphere. Indonesian PR Natalegawa commented that the regime's reasoning for denying the SYG's request to see ASSK was to preserve the independence of the judicial process. Natalegawa commented that Indonesia was "keen that this applies in a good way." Singaporean PR Menon said that Ban's visit represented a combined, international effort and Singapore "never really expected concrete results" from one visit. He added that elections needed to be free and fair but cautioned the Friends against pre-judging the outcome of ASSK's trial.

18. (SBU) Republic of Korea DPR Bonghyun commented that Ban's meetings were good, but said that Korea was very disappointed there was no ASSK meeting. Bonghyun added that such a meeting would have been an important, symbolic gesture of the regime's willingness to engage with the UN and the international community. He said that Korea is "suspicious" of the Burmese government's intentions with respect to upcoming elections. Bonghyun added that if the Burmese do not engage with the UN and the international community, there should be consequences.

The EU and others

19. (SBU) Sweden, on behalf of the EU, and Norway welcomed the SYG's visit to Burma as a "courageous step." Both pledged their support to the good offices mission and their willingness to engage in response to positive developments in Burma. Australian PR Quinlan said the Burmese response to the SYG's requests was "unsatisfactory." He commented that Australia, like the UK, will have to "take stronger action" if ASSK's trial concludes negatively.
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